DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 422 623 EA 029 291

AUTHOR Macpherson, Ian
TITLE Creating Space for the Voices of Significant Stakeholders in Curriculum Leadership.
PUB DATE 1998-04-00
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Diego, CA, April 13-17, 1998).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative (142) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Action Research; *Curriculum Development; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; Instructional Effectiveness; *Leadership Responsibility; *Parent Participation; *Participative Decision Making; *Readiness; Student Participation; *Teacher Participation
IDENTIFIERS Arizona (Phoenix); Australia (Brisbane); Conceptual Frameworks; *Curriculum Leaders; England (Cambridge); Hong Kong

ABSTRACT

This paper reports on collaborative, school-based research in an Australian Research Council-funded project that focused on curriculum leadership for effective learning and teaching. Although the research addressed certain questions about the nature of curriculum leadership and its representation in varied teaching/learning contexts, it raised others concerning major stakeholders' "readiness" to engage in curriculum leadership action. This paper explores how and to what extent stakeholders (teachers, students, and parents) perceive they are included in curriculum decision making. The study is set within a critical, collaborative action-research approach based on small-group discussions held in four cultural contexts: Brisbane (Australia); Hong Kong; Cambridge (United Kingdom); and Phoenix, Arizona (USA). These discussions produced some propositions regarding stakeholder place, readiness, and potential. Regarding place, curriculum leadership is a shared phenomenon within a teaching/learning community that encourages everyone's participation, even those with dissonant voices. Readiness means developing competence, confidence, esteem, and reflective capacity. Stakeholders have the potential to become empowered and develop a sense of community, recognition, and empathy. Included are "windows" summarizing each site's discussion. (Contains 56 references.) (MLH)

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ED 422 623

Creating space for the voices of significant stakeholders in curriculum leadership

(Paper Presentation in Session 15.15 Teachers Changing Curriculum,
Time 2:15 - 3:45, Marriott, Manchester 2)

Ian Macpherson,
School of Professional Studies,
Queensland University of Technology,
Kelvin Grove Campus,
Victoria Park Road,
KELVIN GROVE, Queensland, 4059.
Phone: 61 7 3864 3425
Fax: 61 7 3864 3981
E Mail:i.macpherson@qut.edu.au

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I. Macpherson

EA 029 291

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, April 13-17, 1998.

EA 029 391

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, April 13-17, 1998.

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ABSTRACT

This paper reflects upon collaborative school-based research over recent years in an ARC-funded project which focused on curriculum leadership for effective learning and teaching. While the research addressed certain questions about the nature of curriculum leadership and its rich diversity of representation in a range of teaching/learning contexts, it raised others of significance in relation to the "readiness" of significant stakeholders to engage in curriculum leadership practice. This paper begins to explore to what extent and in what ways all stakeholders have voice and are included in curriculum leadership practice.

The paper is informed by emerging understandings about curriculum leadership from the Research Project mentioned above, and by insights derived from relevant literature about the empowerment of significant stakeholders to engage in and transform curriculum leadership practice.

Some very tentative propositions about creating space for significant stakeholders in curriculum leadership are presented within the context of some exploratory research in a small number of schools across a small number of cross-cultural sites.

The paper concludes with a call to define empowerment to engage in and transform curriculum leadership practice by all stakeholders in ways which are authentic and relevant in teaching/learning contexts. Such a call will foreshadow possible ways of responding to, and further researching, the challenge of creating space for the voices of all stakeholders in curriculum leadership.

JOINT OWNERSHIP OF IDEAS

This paper reports research from a project funded by the Australian Research Council and Education Queensland in 1996 and 1997. The members of the research team included Tania Aspland, Bob Elliott, Ian Macpherson, Adrian McInman and Christine Proudford, School of Professional Studies and Ross Brooker, School of Human Movement Studies, Queensland University of Technology; and Joan Jenkins, Leonie Shaw, Greg Thurlow, Christine Woods, Laurie Wheldon and Del Colvin, Education Queensland. Lynn Burnett and Sue Powrie were involved as Research Assistants in the second year of the project. The ideas developed in this paper were developed with the knowledge of the research team mentioned above and facilitated by QUT's Professional Development Program for Academic Staff. The paper forms the basis for a research grant application for a much larger research investigation in the latter part of 1998 and during 1999. This investigation will use an action research approach and employ a mixed methodology as a means of developing further and authenticating a living educational theory about creating space for the voices of significant stakeholders in curriculum leadership.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The following are gratefully acknowledged:

- People in school communities in Queensland, Hong Kong, England and Arizona who willingly gave their time and thoughts
- Higher Education personnel at Queensland University of Technology, Hong Kong Institute of Education, Chinese University of Hong Kong, University of Hong Kong, Homerton College, School of Education (University of Cambridge), and Arizona State University West
- Research Assistants (Letitia Whitmore and Rowena McIver) who collected data and did preliminary analyses in Queensland and Arizona respectively.

INTRODUCTION

This paper reports upon collaborative school-based research over recent years in an Australian Research Council-funded project which focused on curriculum leadership for effective learning and teaching. While the research addressed certain questions about the nature of curriculum leadership and its rich diversity of representation in a range of teaching/learning sites (namely secondary and primary/elementary schools), it raised others of significance in relation to the "readiness" of significant stakeholders to engage in curriculum leadership action. This paper explores to what extent and in what ways significant stakeholders (especially teachers, students and parents) perceive they have voice and are included in curriculum leadership action. Stakeholders, for the purposes of this paper are defined as those people who have a concerned interest in what goes on in schools in the name of teaching and learning.

An overview of curriculum leadership is provided; and an initial exploration of the notion of "readiness to engage in curriculum leadership action" is undertaken as a basis for significant stakeholders (teachers, students and parents) to have voice and inclusion in curriculum leadership. The work is set within an action research approach which is characterised as both critical and collaborative. The use of narratives written by, and conversations with significant stakeholders provide lifeworld perspectives (Habermas, 1987) or windows through which generative insights and understandings are voiced as propositions about the readiness to engage in curriculum leadership action in schools and classrooms. The propositions seek to capture the richness and diversity across cultural contexts and specific teaching/learning sites.

> ***The purpose of the paper, then, is to present the tentative first steps of an emerging living educational theory about creating space for the voices of significant stakeholders in curriculum leadership via an exploration of their perceptions of readiness to engage in curriculum leadership action.***

A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The paper is framed by a theorised position about curriculum leadership which derives from a view that celebrates the centrality of teachers in curriculum decision-making and their role as curriculum makers in schools and classrooms (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Brubaker, 1993; Henderson & Hawthorne, 1995, Macpherson, Elliott & Aspland, 1995). This position is discussed in detail elsewhere (for example, Macpherson, Aspland, Brooker, Elliott & Thurlow, 1996; Macpherson, Aspland, Elliott, Proudford, Shaw & Thurlow, 1996; Elliott, Brooker, Macpherson McInman & Thurlow, 1997). In these examples, the informing literature with its associated ideas about curriculum and leadership is discussed at greater length.

Curriculum leadership includes any initiative that teachers in the multi-faceted contexts of teaching/learning sites may undertake to encourage more effective learning and teaching. It is about leading learning and seizing opportunities that appear to have the potential to enhance learning and teaching experiences and outcomes. Our theorised position, then, proposes that curriculum leadership involves those actions which are intimately related to the knowledge, skills and attitudes that teachers hold about their curriculum context, which interact with their personal qualities, resulting in actions for enhanced learning and teaching in that context. Furthermore, it recognises that:

- **people (and particularly people working together) are important in any teaching/learning setting;**
- **curriculum leadership is a shared phenomenon among a range of stakeholders who make complementary contributions to the shape and practice of curriculum leadership at any one site;**
- **collaborative effort is desirable in promoting curriculum leadership for effective learning and teaching;**
- **at each teaching/learning site, curriculum leadership action is shaped by three contextual factors (the images of curriculum held by people, the organisational arrangements and the social relationships among people);**
- **individual personal factors are important in mediating the contextual elements and seizing the opportunities; and**
- **the mix of contextual elements is unique to each teaching/learning site of curriculum leadership action, and impacts upon the way persons individually and collectively mediate these elements and seize opportunities for curriculum leadership action (See Brooker, Aspland, Macpherson, Jenkins, Woods, Elliott, Proudford & Kemmis, 1996).**

This paper adds other significant stakeholders such as students and parents to the centrality of teachers in curriculum decision-making. If curriculum leadership is a shared phenomenon at a teaching/learning site, and if it seeks to include all stakeholders in its enactment, then it follows that we must be interested in the socially-constructed contexts and processes which shape curriculum leadership as a shared phenomenon at the levels of both conceptualisation and practice. Considerations of alienation (for example, Australian Curriculum Studies Association, 1996) and calls for partnerships and collaborative efforts in education (for example, Australian Curriculum Studies Association, 1996; Education Queensland, 1997; Education Department, Hong Kong, 1997; Blunkett, 1997; Stokes, 1997) point to the need of finding authentic ways of listening to the voices of these stakeholders and including them in curriculum leadership action (or practice).

There is no doubt that other significant stakeholders in the broader community, business and industry could be identified. However, significant stakeholders in the exploratory research investigation reported in this paper are confined to teachers, students and parents (See Bates, 1991; Brady, 1995).

What is intriguing is to explore not so much the objective opportunities for engaging in curriculum leadership action, nor even the way in which these are perceived subjectively and with desire to engage by stakeholders; but the factors which contribute to the readiness of stakeholders to engage in curriculum leadership action. A research question, then, emerges:

How does a view of curriculum leadership as a shared phenomenon contribute to shaping stakeholders' perceptions of:
1. their PLACE in curriculum leadership;
2. their READINESS to engage in curriculum leadership action; and

3. their POTENTIAL to transform curriculum through having voice and authentic inclusion in curriculum leadership.

The exploratory research investigation outlined in this paper has used this question to interact with the lifeworld perspectives of selected teachers, students and parents about the empowerment of stakeholders to engage in and transform (i.e. to have voice and authentic inclusion in) curriculum leadership action. Authentic inclusion has to do with the actual and visibly demonstrable involvement of stakeholders in not only providing their perceptions of what should be included in the curriculum and how it should be experienced by learners, but also being a meaningful (or empowered) and continuing part in the processes which make the "why", "what", "how" and "so what" decisions associated with curriculum leadership action. The exploration of these perspectives is being informed by literature relating to such areas as empowerment and transformation (for example, Romanish, 1991; Smith, 1993; Kemmis, 1995, Shor, 1996) teacher leadership (for example, Macpherson, Elliott & Aspland, 1995; Rallis & Rossman, 1995; Moller and Katzenmeyer, 1996) and voice (for example, Keedy & Drmacich, 1991; McConnell, 1991; Trotter, 1991; Etheridge & Hall, 1992; Gitlin, Bringhurst, Burns, Coley, Myers, Price, Russell & Tiess, 1992; Mellencamp, 1992; Navarro, 1992; Orner, 1992; Pease & Copa, 1992; Roberts & Dungan, 1993; Rosaen, 1993; Covaleskie, 1994; Hargreaves, 1994; Liontos, 1994; Dana, 1995; Johnston & Nicholls, 1995; Hargreaves, 1996; McIntyre, 1996; Rudduck, Chaplain and Wallace, 1996; Beresford, 1998).

A METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The nature of the research question and the theoretical framework which informs it suggested that an appropriate way of pursuing the exploratory research investigation was via an action research approach which is both critical and collaborative (Aspland, Macpherson, Proudford & Whitmore, 1996). The approach is critical in that it operates within a socially-critical position (Kemmis, Cole and Suggett, 1983) of curriculum leadership which values the centrality of teachers and significant others in curriculum decision-making, along with notions of empowerment and transformation (Smith, 1993); and collaborative because the research investigation highlights the lifeworld perspectives of participants as both sources of and contributors to the analysis of data and as a basis for working together in transformative action. The approach is action-oriented as it attempts to critique (from a socially-critical perspective) past and present curriculum thinking and practice as a basis for participants themselves to reconstruct and transform their practice. Broadly, then, the approach provides a basis as an example of critical education research (Smith, 1993) for participants to develop a sense of empowerment (individually and/or in collaboration with colleagues) to engage in and advocate for critically-informed and transformed (in an ongoing sense) curriculum practice. It became obvious that, as the exploratory research investigation proceeded, action research, in its fullest sense, was not going to be feasible. However, there were encouraging signs that in a larger and longer research investigation, action research would be both appropriate and possible.

Within this approach, narrative (for example, Gough, 1994; Aspland, Brooker, Macpherson, Proudford & Kemmis, 1996; Aspland and Macpherson, 1996; Aspland, Macpherson, Elliott & Brooker, 1997; Beattie, 1997; Fenstermacher, 1997) and conversation (for example, Applebee, 1996, Feldman, 1997) were used as a basis for interacting with and seeking to understand the lifeworld perspectives of teachers, students and parents in terms of the three parts to the research question as outlined above. In the exploratory work so far, it was the intention that participants would be invited to construct a narrative from their own experience in curriculum practice at teaching/learning sites using the three parts of the research question as a framework. Conversations in small groups were to follow at each teaching/learning site in four cultural contexts (Brisbane

(Australia), Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China), Cambridge (United Kingdom) and Phoenix (USA)). This intention could not always be fully realised at each site, and the research approach had to be modified to meet local constraints and the limited time available at each cross-cultural context.

An analytical process which seeks to be both collaborative and critical used iterative techniques (as a form of hermeneutic circle (Schwandt, 1997)) to emphasise that the voices of teachers, students and parents were being recorded as faithfully as possible. Where possible, up to three schools per context were used in the exploratory research investigation. Each school in each cross-cultural context is being considered as a case of stakeholders' perceptions about place in and readiness to engage in curriculum leadership; as well as potential to transform curriculum. It was not possible to focus on individual schools as cases in the UK, so the selection of schools, teachers, parents and pupils contacted comprise the one case.

The case reports (elicited from the narratives and mostly, from the conversations) have been used as a basis for exploring the ways in which the lifeworld perspectives are being shaped within each cultural context and within each school context. It is the interaction of these perspectives with the research question that has led to the propositions outlined below.

However, the paradox of research investigations which focus on cases (Simons, 1996) is being encountered in that both the richness and diversity of perspectives and the similarities across cases are being captured. In this respect, the research investigation outlined in this paper does not seek to generalise; rather it seeks, with case study data from Brisbane, Hong Kong, Cambridge and Phoenix, to be generative of ideas about creating space for the voices of significant stakeholders in curriculum leadership at the teaching/learning sites.

The data sources in this exploratory research investigation (and in any ongoing larger investigations) are the significant stakeholders who develop narratives and engage in subsequent small group conversations which reflect upon, critique and seek to reconstruct stakeholders' perceptions about curriculum leadership action within a framework provided by the three parts of the research question. Since this exploratory research investigation aimed to generate rather than generalise ideas about creating space for the voices of significant stakeholders in curriculum leadership, the specific sites or groups for study do not claim to constitute a "representative" cross section of teaching/learning sites or groups. However, the ideas being generated form a living educational theory (Whitehead, 1989) which will continue to develop in further studies which may include larger and more representative samples and which, in time, may lead to more generalisable findings in the future.

The documented data from this exploratory research investigation include the written narratives where they were completed, field notes of conversations with people participating, case summaries (checked by the relevant participants) and broad summaries of each cross-cultural context (checked with small groups of local higher education people). These data are briefly represented in a number of windows a little later where they interact with the propositions. These propositions relate to the three parts of the research question; are couched in terms which represent ideas in relevant literature; and are used to interact with the voices of teachers, students and parents, as represented in the case studies. The propositions seek to celebrate the richness and diversity across cultural contexts and specific school sites and focus on:

PLACE

1. the centrality of significant stakeholders and their complementarity in curriculum leadership;

READINESS

2. the confidence and competence which significant stakeholders develop as a readiness to engage in curriculum leadership action; and

POTENTIAL

3. the conceptions of potential to engage (i.e. to have voice and authentic inclusion) in curriculum leadership action.

SOME PROPOSITIONS EMERGING FROM THE TENTATIVE FIRST STEPS

The amount of data available for writing this paper was not extensive. It would appear, nevertheless, that these preliminary data, as they interact with the research question and the literature associated with it, are generating some interesting propositions that are worth further exploration in more extensive and detailed investigations and actions.

One difficulty with this type of research (both in the early exploratory stages and in later more extensive and detailed stages) is to capture directly the voices of those stakeholders which the research is claiming to represent. Schools are becoming increasingly wary of university researchers and Principals, it seems, are playing the role of protective gatekeepers very effectively. A salutory lesson is being re-emphasised here concerning the need for time to initiate and maintain a collaborative working relationship with the schools used and the teachers who participate. There has to be something in it for them, and especially in the very practical terms of day-to-day life in classrooms. Added to all of this is another dimension - the perception of those in gatekeeping roles that students and parents might not have all that much to offer in terms of curriculum leadership!

Yet another difficulty relates to the reporting of this type of research. It would not be possible within the limits of a paper presentation such as this one to represent the full detail of what the voices of all stakeholders are saying. One is caught between dwelling on the detail of one voice and relishing the account as a good literary piece (or story) at a descriptive level on the one hand, and trying to critique what the voices are saying and informing at a theoretical and methodological level, on the other. This paper "errs" on the side of the latter and such an approach is argued in terms of the stated purpose of the paper which contains elements of description, reflection and theorising in making the tentative first steps of an emerging living educational theory.

It would appear that creating space for the voices of significant stakeholders in curriculum leadership involves the development of a sense of community at a teaching/learning site. It is within this sense of community that all stakeholders may be supported and sustained in their efforts to engage in curriculum leadership. When talking, then, of professional development for teachers, we should really be talking about the development of all stakeholders and the release of their potential to engage in curriculum leadership.

Our work in curriculum leadership provides a way of describing and understanding the unique mix of factors operating at each teaching/learning site. Such description and understanding, in turn, provide a way of creating space for the voices of all stakeholders within the uniqueness of specific sites and within the broader contexts of societal trends, educational policies and systemic priorities.

At this stage, it looks as though the following propositions are being reflected in a variety of ways in the exploratory research investigation data, and appear to be worth further investigation and ongoing action. We must be aware, however, that these propositions are very tentative, and the windows into the case data are very frosted, so to speak. The propositions which follow also appear in the next section of this paper where they interact with the lifeworld perspectives of the teachers, parents and students who participated.

PLACE

RE AWARENESS AND DESIRE, it is proposed that:

Stakeholders are aware that curriculum leadership is a shared phenomenon within the community of a teaching/learning site, and that an individual stakeholder's desire to become involved is nurtured in an inclusive manner by those who currently have the power (and are willing to share that power).

RE ACCEPTANCE AND LANGUAGE, it is proposed that:

Individual stakeholders (some of whom may represent dissonant voices) have a sense of acceptance by those who currently have the power and to have access to a language whose meaning is shared in order for reciprocal communication to take place.

(See Dana, 1992; McConnell, 1991; Roberts and Dungan, 1993; Hargreaves, 1994 and 1996.)

READINESS

RE COMPETENCE AND CONFIDENCE, it is proposed that:

Individual stakeholders build on their growing sense of awareness and acceptance and develop a sense of competence to engage in curriculum leadership as an ongoing conversation with other stakeholders. A competence to engage brings with it a confidence to become involved.

RE PARTICIPATION AND ESTEEM/WORTH, it is proposed that:

Individual stakeholders who have the opportunity to participate will develop a sense of esteem and worth when they see that their voices are being heard and heeded.

RE REFLECTION AND DEFENSIBLE POSITION, it is proposed that:

Individual stakeholders reflect upon their participation in ways that are critically and contextually informed and educationally defensible.

(See Mellencamp, 1992; Hargreaves, 1994 and 1996; Keedy and Drmacich, 1991; and Rosaen, 1993.)

POTENTIAL

RE RECONSTRUCTION AND EMPOWERMENT, it is proposed that:

Individual stakeholders are supported and sustained in their participation so that their potential to engage in curriculum leadership is realised in ways that are reconstructive and empowering.

RE RECOGNITION AND EMPATHY, it is proposed that:

Individual stakeholders retain their individuality, but at the same time, see themselves as part of a wider community with a common purpose. The balance

here is managed by a sense of empathy that the most appropriate community decision action at any given time may not be their individual perspective. (See Gitlin et al. 1991; Roberts and Dungan, 1993; and Covaleskie, 1994.)

Propositions like these, of course, raise more questions than they provide answers. They may not be reflected entirely in the current reality of the four cultural contexts, but they do seem to capture the mood of both what the relevant literature and these stakeholders would like to happen and what the rhetoric of current policy statements is espousing.

They are not universal "laws", but they are signposts for considering approaches and strategies which individual teaching/learning sites may implement within the uniqueness of their own local and broader societal contexts. And this is where Action Research, in its fuller sense, fits in!

THE LIFEWORLD PERSPECTIVES OF TEACHERS, PARENTS AND STUDENTS INTERACTING WITH THE PROPOSITIONS THROUGH FOUR WINDOWS

A HONG KONG WINDOW

This window is based on interactions with people at one primary school and one secondary school, and with a range of higher education people who provided general contextual information and checked my observations and interpretations. Hong Kong has a very structured approach to the curriculum, and even in more recent times with the introduction of the Target-oriented Curriculum, there is still a heavy emphasis on outcomes as measured by examination results. Very recent emphases on quality contain reference to increasing levels of partnership. The School Management Initiative, introduced in the early 1990's, began to encourage local responsibility for educational decision-making. The evaluation of the target-oriented curriculum is now beginning to focus on pedagogy at the classroom level, so there do appear to be opportunities for a greater involvement of people in the curriculum at the school and classroom levels.

PLACE

Teachers are enthusiastic and committed, very often in spite of contextual pressures, such as insufficient resources, and lack of adequate professional development.

The external pressures associated with examinations restrict the opportunities for school-based curriculum development.

The expectations of parents (who are very busy earning money) are that the school will take major responsibility to educate their children. If their expectations are not met, it would be common for them to blame the school.

The role of the PTA is dominantly confined to fund-raising and welfare.

Students in Years 1 to 3 would find it very difficult, if not impossible to contribute. Maybe in the higher grade there could be some opportunity.

Extra-curricular activities have given students the opportunity to engage in leadership and their experience here has carried over into the classroom in such areas as two-way communication, group discussions and interpersonal relationships. Yet very often, students are still seen as the passive partners in the educational process.

Talk about empowerment of teachers may bring feelings of apprehensions, if not panic, and this can include Principals. The talk will have to be accompanied by activities that will support teachers in developing a sense of empowerment.

Teachers' engagement in curriculum leadership actions focuses very much on the classroom.

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The centrality of teachers is based on a school-wide collective belief in catalysing students in that students must learn how to learn as they need to teach themselves after leaving school and success in school means more than good examination results. It means learning how to live as well as how to make a living.

From these comments, it is apparent that the schools see themselves as communities, but they recognise that the factors associated with curriculum leadership are not operating in a mix which would be conducive to actually implementing the first proposition relating to awareness and desire. The concerns that parents are too busy and that young students would not understand seem to work against the second proposition concerning acceptance and language.

Signposts for further investigation and action include the mapping of a teaching-learning site, using the curriculum leadership factors. Such mapping would help to identify possible starting points for ongoing work. Attitudes of those who currently have the power (i.e. teachers) possibly need to be challenged, critiqued and reconstructed in order to develop a broader understanding of where other stakeholders may play complementary roles in curriculum leadership. It is obvious that the two schools, if mapped in detail, would present unique mixes of the curriculum leadership factors, which, in turn, would require unique ways of responding. The nature of the broader historical and social contexts is also significant in mapping the specific school contexts.

READINESS

Large classes, time, resources and professional development are areas which need to be addressed in helping teachers t[illegible]evelop a sense of empowerment to engage in reflective curriculum leadership practice.

Curriculum is a very vague term in Hong Kong - often it is seen as the externally-imposed syllabus. At this stage, there seems to be no widespread common ground for teachers to think about and discuss curriculum in broader "school-based" and "curriculum leadership" terms.

Teaching is a very practical activity, but it is also a very value-laden activity. Teaching practice is enhanced by the use of a value/theoretical position to reflect upon and reconstruct (in an ongoing way) practice.

Professional development is seen to be the key to developing a sense of competence and confidence. The value-laden nature of curriculum and teaching is a worthwhile focus for the content of professional development activities. This, of course, is crucial in terms of reflection and defensible position. What is interesting about the comments above is that the needs of students and parents are not mentioned. Professional development needs to be extended to include the development of all stakeholders, especially if the proposition about participation and esteem/worth is taken seriously. At this point, parents and students appear to be sidelined, and while this could be defended on the grounds of cultural and historical context, it cannot be sustained in the context of current policy rhetoric which is calling for local action and greater participation.

POTENTIAL

Action Research is a useful way for planning to move ahead with local action.

In the case of the secondary school, there was guarded optimism about a greater involvement by all stakeholders in curriculum leadership. There appeared to be more optimism in the minds of students than of teachers.

The guarded optimism that was expressed at both schools related to a degree of cynicism that the rhetoric of policy is not always realised in the reality of practice. The development opportunities alluded to above will need to address such areas as interpersonal skills that value and recognise the distinctive inputs of the various stakeholders, shared language, more collaborative and democratic ways of seeing school organisation, the use of Action Research to strike the balance of theory and practice in the ongoing critique and reconstruction of curriculum practice. All of this relates to the proposition dealing with reconstruction and empowerment. In terms of recognition and empathy, it is important to consider the complementary roles of the various stakeholders and to take account that even within a stakeholder group, there may well be a variety of opinion

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The complexity and diversity of curriculum leadership action at various sites highlights the need to portray the uniqueness of each site and to develop ways of moving ahead that are appropriate for that site.

AN AUSTRALIAN WINDOW

The contents of this window are based on interactions with teachers, students and parents at one primary school and one secondary school in Brisbane. Curriculum history in Australia in the late 70's and 80's was one of widespread school-based curriculum development and an increased emphasis on a variety of school-based assessment approaches. External examinations did not exert the pressure they once did on the curriculum, although the increased competition for university places in the late 80's brought this pressure at least to the upper levels of secondary schooling. Economic rationalism brought moves to centralise curriculum and to exercise quality control. Attempts at national curriculum have been subverted somewhat by an underlying Australian commitment to the rights of the States. Nevertheless, there have been increasing measures to ensure quality of learning experiences and especially outcomes. Accountability is seen to be more important than autonomy, and where there has been a devolution of responsibility to the local level, this has been more in the area of management of funds and personnel than of curriculum. However, recent policy documents and systemic initiatives stress notions of partnership and participation.

PLACE

The major role for teachers is in program development at the school and classroom level and not so much in syllabus development. A lot depends on the Principal, and the Deputy Principal, along with Heads of Departments in the case of secondary.

Students at both levels comment that they do have choice within classes, although a lot depends on the teacher.

Parents believe they hear teachers saying "This is what we are going to do." They do, however , identify a number of areas "at the edges of the core curriculum" where they can have an input.

At the secondary level, parents see their involvement much more in an advisory/supportive role where most of the contact is with their own children.

It is obvious that the various stakeholders see a place for themselves in curriculum leadership, but again, as in Hong Kong, so much depends on understanding the unique characteristics and dynamics of the particular school. The sense of community which is alluded to in both propositions relating to place seems to require a deeper understanding and a greater elaboration in practice at these schools. The power held by teachers, at least in the perceptions of students and parents would be an area of fascinating investigation and action. There is obviously much work to be done in the area of the second proposition where parents and students feel more accepted and included.

READINESS

Teachers in the relatively small primary school find time a crucial factor affecting their readiness to engage in curriculum leadership. Often, they participate not so much because they want to or feel that they can. Rather, they participate because they felt an obligation to colleagues who were also hard-pressed for time.

Meanwhile, teachers in the secondary school felt they were undertaking a very active role about which they felt considerable confidence. They were keen to be involved even more, and would like to have an input to syllabus-determining bodies outside the school.

Students at both schools wanted to have a greater involvement but they were not sure how much the school and teachers would support them in this desire. Secondary students made constructive suggestions about greater involvement in relevant meetings and committees at the school.

Parents make comments about wanting more communication about what is taught and more involvement as partners in offering activities that tapped into their expertise. One parent expressed bitterness about an

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experience where there did not appear to be much appreciation from teachers about the effort expended.

One parent commented: "I would like to have a consultative role in both curriculum and implementation by the individual teachers ... and I feel confident to do so." Another parent said: "I would have no confidence to undertake such a role." This parent thought that it was not possible for the curriculum to be parent-driven.

"I would like to find out more about what my children learn at school and would like the opportunity for any interested parent to be involved in school meetings on the curriculum of specific subject areas. I would like more input into methods also, but I would fear treading on teachers' toes. I would feel confident in being involved in decision-making about what and how my children learn at school if I had plenty of information at hand."

There is some degree of confidence expressed in stakeholders' comments about readiness to engage in curriculum leadership at both schools. Professional development for teachers needs to be extended in terms of school community development for all stakeholders if there is to be any authentic participation and any sharing of power. Again, boundaries need to be determined so that all stakeholders know what their potential for contribution is. It was interesting to note that at one school, teachers identified themselves as curriculum modifiers, adapters and researchers. This augurs well for taking the proposition about reflection and defensible position seriously.

POTENTIAL

Teachers identify themselves as curriculum modifiers, adapters and researchers. They see their role in curriculum leadership positively, although they are realistic about constraints relating to time and the increasing complexity of their work. They are looking for further opportunities and agree that at present these are limited.

Students at both schools want more input in the area of choice and determination of what they learn and how.

Parents see a greater role for themselves though the teachers say "this can be tricky". The rejoinder to this by parents is that they feel the message coming from teachers is: "keep your nose out of it." One parent commented: "The whole area of teaching/educating our children is very much a protected area, closely guarded by the educators. Interest and inquiries about curriculum or the child's academic progress are welcome, but such inquiries are very much controlled by the respective teacher."

Another parent said: "... I feel opportunities for parent decision-making in these areas will remain very limited unless this becomes government policy."

One parent said that there was a structure for having an input and offering support, while another stated: There is not an apparent framework for parents to be involved in structuring the curriculum."

The diversity of opinion evident in the parents' comments highlights the complexity of a school context as well as the associated need to map that context as a means of understanding it. It cautions against the application of "pat" recipes for action and change. It emphasises the need for professional development to be "climates for fostering a sense of empowerment in all stakeholders". Further, it indicates that we should address the needs of stakeholders who perceive themselves to be marginalised and that the "in" stakeholders think about ways of sharing power and implementing strategies that are empathic and inclusive.

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A UNITED KINGDOM WINDOW

This window is based on a brief review of some of the documentation relating to the National Curriculum and the impact it is having in schools; interactions with a small selection of parents, pupils and students in their homes and a range of schools personnel in a variety of schools in southern, eastern and central England (8 in all); and a number of higher educational personnel in some universities.

A VERY GENERAL OVERVIEW

The National Curriculum which was introduced in 1988 was seen to have a very centralising effect on curriculum control and the perception by most teachers and higher education personnel was that it eroded the professional autonomy of teachers. The National Curriculum was toned down in the first half of the 90's; but there appears to be a lingering feeling among teachers that the control is still very centralised, and even more so with more recent emphases on performance and quality. Research studies being conducted under the auspices of the Economic and Social Research Council have been asking questions about the effects of the National Curriculum on teaching and learning in schools, what the relationship between schools and parents has been; and what can we learn from pupils and teachers about how to improve what goes on in schools.

In 1997, a White Paper, Excellence in Schools, appeared shortly after New Labor came to power. There are significant sections in this document and in accompanying documents about giving voice to teachers and parents. Sadly, there is nothing mentioned about pupils. Recent announcements have declared that some schools will be declared as action zones as a means of showing ways of putting the goals (set for 2002) into practice now. Overriding all of this is a clear indication on the part of the Government that it will not tolerate poor performance. For the Government, so the White Paper declares, education is at the heart of government.

In terms of PLACE, it appears that all of this leaves teachers still feeling marginalised and devalued (especially in the light of current salary negotiations). Parents, and pupils are not sure about their place, but at present, it appears to be one of being kept at "arm's length". The general trend seems to be for teachers to ask parents and pupils what they think, but not to involve them meaningfully in actual decision-making processes.

The propositions concerning READINESS would certainly find support in the rhetoric of the White Paper, and in the findings of those research studies under the auspices of the Economic and Social Research Council. There seems, however, almost an apologetic stance taken by stakeholders that they know their place, and that this place is not necessarily one in which they have authentic inclusion in curriculum leadership practice. Teachers, it seems, back away from more involvement on the basis of an already onerous workload; parents are happy to defer to teachers and to be cast in a supportive role rather than in a role where they enjoy parity of esteem; while pupils have learned that what counts in the final analysis are their exam results. Schools, of course are geared towards marketing themselves on the basis of league tables; and they have a concern to do well in OFSTED inspections.

In spite of the patterns that are briefly described above, there is POTENTIAL for growth and the idea of Action Zones is one of these. Another is the work that is being done in Higher Education institutions, very often in partnership with schools in their respective areas. An article in a recent Times Educational Supplement (20 February, 1998) reported a case where parents themselves were leading the action to fight against a school closure. The schools visited have obvious examples where local actions are being taken which involve all stakeholders. The background layers of the gloomier broader picture may not be so gloomy after all, and the concept of curriculum leadership may be one upon which all stakeholders together may build a culture of advocacy to politicise the rhetoric of policy; to point out what will work and will not work in practice; and to identify the resources and support necessary for an implementation that has a real chance of making a difference.

WHAT ARE PARENTS AND STUDENTS SAYING ABOUT:

THEIR PLACE IN CURRICULUM LEADERSHIP

Parents:

Very little comes back to us as parents. The schools expect us to support our children's learning with supervision and support of homework, and there is a structure for this. This, though is not us affecting the curriculum; rather it's us supplementing the curriculum. At a broader school level, there is very little involvement of parents in a meaningful

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and authentic way. (Form VI Parent)

Since the National Curriculum, there has not been much room for parental input ,because people are trying to cram so much in. (Parents of children in both Primary and Secondary levels)

Parental input gets less and less as kids get older. They need our consent, but that does not necessarily mean any consultation... There are effects in terms of welfare issues, but the question remains about how much real effect there is in terms of curriculum. Parent Governors probably do, but parents generally do not. It depends very much on the school whether or not school-based curriculum decision-making involving all stakeholders is valued. (Parents of children in lower secondary and Form VI levels)

Our children attend a small school and while the National Curriculum dictates the majority of what is taught in the school, we believe the small size of the school contributes to a closer relationship with teachers. We have no particular input to the subject matter or how it is taught, but we have a support role in supervising children with special needs, etc. (Parents of children at a Village Primary School)

Whatever changes there have been, we have reacted to. We have not been proactive. Parent involvement sounds very democratic, but it can be very risky. Parents, however, should not be distanced from schools, but encouraged to have a relationship with schools, characterized by support from and consultation with. In my view, it is not about giving power to parents. Parent representation sometimes on Governing Bodies can be that of an unrepresentative clique. (Parent of a lower Sixth student)

Students

Students in Form VI mainly saw their role in having the opportunity to make choices about subjects to be studied; approaches to be followed and specific topics chosen for study within subjects. Involvement in Year and School Councils was seen to be more concerned with social and welfare issues rather than with curriculum issues. One student noted that in a humanities subject, the students could send a representative to staff meetings, although this was being strongly resisted by other subject areas. At another College, a small group of students expressed appreciation for the way teachers treated them like adults and they noted that the benefits accruing to them included broad knowledge, independent learning capabilities and development in interpersonal relationships. A similar view came from a Lower Form VI student at another Secondary College where the students ranged in age from 14 to 18. A GCSE student, looking back over his five years at a village College, could see how his teachers had provided a structure for him to have input to what and how he learned. His younger sister, just starting at the College, noted that this was her experience even in Year 7. A small group of GCSE students in another College thought that they had very little involvement, and basically they did as they were told (although this was qualified in terms of the choice they had in Years 10 and 11 and whether the teachers "taught" or "lectured". A small group of students at another Village College wanted to see more student involvement at the level of consultation and negotiation. They believed it was going to get better as the new Principal seemed very keen on that sort of thing. Children in primary school felt that they did not have much input into the curriculum. One boy in Year 5 said that he liked his teacher very much and that he treated you like a grown-up. Children in another family made the same comment about this particular teacher.

Parents and students see that their place in curriculum leadership is limited at the edge of the real decision-making. They see their role limited to a subject-oriented view of curriculum and they do not stress an active role in a process-oriented view of curriculum. Where they do see possibilities for an involvement, they see that involvement to be very much a supporting, if not subservient one. They see that the approaches taken by school personnel in key roles are significant in including them (See the first proposition). It was interesting to note that the National Curriculum had, to some extent, given parents and students a language to discuss curriculum matters. However, the language associated with the rhetoric of the 1997 White Paper which talks about the voices of teachers and parents appeared less well known. It is worth noting that there is a diversity of opinion among both parents and students concerning their place in curriculum leadership. It seems appropriate, therefore, to use the curriculum leadership factors and the propositions to map the curriculum environment of a teaching/learning site as a basis for understanding and better-informed action.

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Parents would like more communication and discussion, although as long as the results are all right, we don't really mind. I concede that teachers' workloads are very heavy and it might not be possible for a lot of discussion to take place. (Parent of a Form VI student)

As Parent Governor, I really appreciated the way the Deputy Head and I went to a training day together to help in getting a Parents' Committee established. (Parent Governor in a small village Primary School)

I don't want to become too involved because I am not trained. I need development, otherwise I am apprehensive and I feel out on a limb. (A comment made in relation to this parent's involvement in helping with a reading program.) (Parent of children in primary and secondary levels)

Clear channels of communication are very important when you consider the inputs of teachers pupils and parents into curriculum (which works like a triangle). (Parents of children in lower secondary and Form VI levels)

The PTA is largely related to fund-raising, although this was changing with the development of the PTA more as a liaison group with the Head Teacher about more central issues. (Parents of children at a Village Primary School) (In another school, the PTA had been renamed the Parent Liaison Group as a means of getting away from the stereotypical fund-raising image. In another school, the "Investors in People" program has focused very strongly on developing all stakeholders in the school community for taking a more active and authentic role in school-based curriculum decision-making/curriculum leadership.)

Students

Students are able to participate forcefully and effectively in negotiating, but at the feedback level, there is little opportunity to have a say. Feedback opportunities do occur informally in some subjects. (Form VI)

I would like to have more opportunity to have even more choice and a greater say in how things were being taught. (Lower Sixth)

Two girls at the primary level noted that they learned more when the teacher was nice and/or was enthusiastic about what he/she was teaching them. (Village Primary School)

There should be more opportunity for consultation and negotiation and there should be more communication both in terms for providing information and being heard. (These lower secondary students thought that this could happen within classes and through the Year Council. They noted that there was some student apathy, and they felt that students needed support and training in terms of having more say.)

A lower Sixth student observed that he thought that the school could recognize that students do appreciate having more of a say, as students are ready to contribute.

A small group of GCSE students commented that they knew about the National Curriculum because teachers were always saying that it determined what they had to learn; but that they did not get taught much about it. These students felt that the National Curriculum expected too much in terms of what had to be covered, and their conclusion was that "we need more time to do less better. That does not mean that we want an easy ride." One Form VI student used the term "coverage-crushed" to describe the curriculum.

Parents, especially, noted that development and training were important if they were to have a more meaningful role in curriculum. Both parents and students noted that communication was very important, as are the processes associated with consultation and negotiation. The style of this communication needs to be in such a form that makes sense for parents and students, it was noted, by one group of students. The place which they occupy in relation to teachers is an area of uncertainty, and it would appear that schools have to clarify the complementary roles of all stakeholders. Associated with this, of course, is a shared understanding of what the school is about in terms of teaching and learning. All three propositions concerning readiness are seemingly appropriate as a basis for further investigating the area of readiness and developing ways of enhancing it for parents and students.

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THEIR POTENTIAL TO ENGAGE IN CURRICULUM LEADERSHIP

Parents

Parents do have a chance to contribute to OFSTED inspections, although only a handful of parents go (and some of these only go because they have an axe to grind). (Form VI Parent)

We see less potential for involvement as the children get older, but we are not really sure about this, as we have not discussed this with parents of older children. (Parents of children in a Village Primary School)

Students

I see a very rigid syllabus imposed from without and the curriculum focus is very coverage rushed. Teachers are probably undervalued. We have a very good Deputy Head who is open and consistent and very positive about the role of Student and Year Councils. (Form VI student)

I have become more competent in understanding why the teachers are giving the students choice and it gives you a sense of taking more responsibility for your own learning. I would like a greater emphasis to be placed on feedback in order to understand, rather than just to keep on trying to cover everything. (GCSE student)

A lower sixth student noted that his school had good ways of communicating with parents. He thought had good ways of making appropriate contacts, and he had no sense of being bypassed at any time.

We want a curriculum which is relevant for us and which allows time for understanding and application. (A group of GCSE students)

Very little was said about potential, and the rigidity of the externally-imposed syllabus was seen to work against any appreciable increase in parental and student participation. A sharing of frustrations among teachers, parents and students might be a useful beginning to shared understandings and collaborative actions about pressures on the school curriculum from without, and processes associated with making local curriculum decisions (and feeding back to the policy level). An empathic understanding of the distinctive roles of teachers, parents and students may create an environment with the potential for authentic inclusion of all stakeholders based on parity of esteem rather than upon a quantitative equality of input.

WHAT ARE TEACHING/MANAGEMENT PERSONNEL IN SCHOOLS SAYING ABOUT THEIR PLACE, READINESS AND POTENTIAL TO ENGAGE IN CURRICULUM LEADERSHIP

There was little opportunity in the various schools visited to speak directly with teachers. Documentation that was available within schools, or oral reports given by Head Teachers indicated that teachers are variously involved in a wide range of activities that contribute to the schools' curriculum policy and practice at the wider school as well as the more specific year and/or subject levels. One Head Teacher who began our conversation by focusing on the pressures and constraints of the National Curriculum, surprised herself as we moved around the school, chatting with children and teachers at the creativity of the many initiatives that were being generated and sustained at the school-based level, said. Teachers were invariably highly supportive of their staff and spoke of them as hard-working, loyal, committed and focused on quality teaching and learning. Look at the following extracts taken from summaries of conversations at the various schools.

Concerning PLACE

Teachers at one school had this to say:

Teachers saw that the National Curriculum and GCSE syllabi provide prescription and are therefore very constraining as to how much input they can have to the curriculum. In fact, associated with such prescription has been the media coverage of teachers which has almost made teachers lose their confidence. This is couple with the pace and the amount of change that has occurred makes teachers feel that so much of what they think is good practice has been challenged and overturned. "We are confused and demoralized". (Secondary)

A teacher in another school felt that teachers did not have a strong voice collectively and that policy pronouncements often made them look silly. It's as if "we haven't been doing these things anyway!" (Primary)

Another school was described as very open with the Head encouraging a lot of human contact, while people in small schools noted that very often the size contributed to people working together and becoming very involved in a wide

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range of discussions and decisions. (Secondary)

In terms of READINESS, schools readily agreed that provisions for professional development were very good and that staff (in some schools all staff) were encouraged to participate in activities and to share their experiences and outcomes with others. Some schools made mention of the "Investors in People" program which helped to focus their commitment to this part of school life. One teacher in a large school noted that very often the expertise for professional development was resident within the school and that staff did not have to leave the school every time professional development was needed. Professional development was invariably linked with the School Development Plan and some schools placed a great emphasis on staff induction programs for all new staff. There was less mention made about development opportunities for parents and students, and concern was expressed about what was really meant by partnership of parents and students in the educational process. Schools seemed generally concerned that partnerships should be authentic and not just a token lip service. Some schools were actively looking for ways to communicate more effectively and inclusively with parents and students; and examples of committees and working groups which go beyond the usual image of the PTA are evident.

Concerning POTENTIAL, schools seem caught between wanting to be engaged in educationally worthwhile activities on the one hand and ensuring that their position in the educational market place (determined largely by examination results and OFSTED inspections) is not jeopardized. What comes through strongly is school personnel's continuing commitment to quality teaching and learning and the total welfare of their pupils and students. One Deputy Head, for example, noted that while things will change more, there is an air of confidence and competence that the school can rise to these ongoing challenges.

The following reflections made after visiting one school capture the mood which to a greater or lesser degree pertained in the larger number of school visited.

In terms of place, a fairly bleak picture is presented of the broader context within which the school has to operate. On closer examination, however, the range of examples talked about and/or seen (when walking around the school and talking with children and teachers) was impressive. This does not deny the heaviness which teachers feel in terms of the imposed rigidity of the National Curriculum; but it does illustrate that where a school community has the organizational arrangements, the social dynamics and a shared view of curriculum that are facilitative of valued involvement of all stakeholders, the negative personal factors felt by teachers in such a crushing policy environment can, to some extent, be mitigated.

In terms of readiness, the focal point was development of all stakeholders in order to establish a sense of authentic partnership. The overall school leadership style seemed to contribute to such developmental processes - a style that values and maintains very open channels of communication, consultation and negotiation.

In terms of potential, the more this Head Teacher talked, the more she realized that this school holds exciting promise for the future as she consolidates the spadework of her early period as the school's Head. She sees fresh challenges, in spite of growing external pressures, to ensure that lively debate is maintained within the school community via ongoing feedback, good communication to all stakeholders, empowerment of all stakeholders to participate meaningfully, and a sense that the school's ethos and focus will continue to evolve to meet changing needs. She believes in her teachers, her parents and her pupils.

The propositions appear to have relevance for the current situation in schools, although on first reading, school personnel feel that this sort of research is not as relevant to the current situation as it might have been, say 15 years ago. On closer examination, school personnel tended to agree that there was value in pursuing an investigation of the propositions in much greater depth at specific sites.

A USA WINDOW

To be provided at the conference session

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A FINAL WORD ... FOR THE TIME BEING

Curriculum as it is experienced by significant stakeholders and as it produces learning outcomes as a basis for ongoing learning in the lives of those involved is not understood alone by a reading of the cultural- and policy-driven artefacts such as curriculum legislation, curriculum frameworks, syllabi, work programs and the like. Rather, the lifeworld perspectives of significant stakeholders (briefly represented in the four windows) demonstrate the potential to provide us with narrative and conversational insights to the real world of curriculum decision-making in schools and classrooms. These windows provide generative insights and understandings about the ways in which significant stakeholders might be meaningfully supported in having voice and authentic inclusion in curriculum leadership action. For example, teachers with their professional expertise; students with their knowledge of youth culture and its intersection with their perceptions of the present and future world; and parents who have a desire to be partners in the education of their children together bring rich insights to the world of curriculum. But the question is how ready are these stakeholders to give voice to these insights and to be authentically included in curriculum decision-making and curriculum leadership action?

The theorised position which frames, and the research approach which was used in this exploratory research investigation combine to form a way of mapping and understanding the curriculum leadership landscape (Clandinin, 1997) and of finding/providing appropriate and distinctive means of supporting and sustaining significant stakeholders in curriculum leadership action within the unique nuances of each cultural context and each teaching/learning site.

As the research investigation continues, implications for ongoing work as a praxis of research, development and action in the area of curriculum leadership will be identified as a basis for continuing the conversation. It is anticipated that the continuing conversation will seek to enhance and advance the emerging living educational theory about creating space for the voices of significant stakeholders in curriculum leadership. The propositions and your comments about them in this conference session are simply the beginning of this continuing conversation.

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